

NORTHEAST SANDS ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY



PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS FOR PLAN INITIATION

The DNR initiated the master planning process for the Northeast Sands Ecological Landscape (NES EL) with a public input process during the months of June and July, 2018. A statewide news release was sent out on June 12 announcing the start of the planning process. The public was invited to attend a public meeting on June 26 at the Florence County Wild Rivers Interpretive and Resource Center in Florence and office hours on June 27 at the DNR Ranger Station in Wausaukee, where they could learn more about the planning region and the properties involved, speak one-on-one with department staff, and submit comments identifying issues to be evaluated in the planning process. Background information on the region and properties and an online questionnaire were also made available on the DNR website. The public comment period was open through July 11. Some 21 people attended the public meeting and office hours, and 53 written comments were received.

The next step in the planning process is to evaluate whether and how to incorporate the many and varied ideas expressed by the public into the development of a draft master plan. Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the plan and how best to incorporate them will be made based on the properties' statutory designations (i.e., Wildlife Area, State Natural Area, etc.), their physical/biological capabilities, the best role of the properties in their local, regional, and statewide context, and on the professional expertise of DNR staff. Every reasonable effort will be made to communicate the reasons for key plan recommendations in the draft plan. Another public input opportunity will be offered when the draft plan is ready for public review.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

Major themes identified in the comments are presented below, organized by topic.

General Resource Management

Comments indicated support for sustainable forest management, timber production, and for both early-successional and old-growth forest condition. The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan and NHI Rapid Ecological Assessments were cited as important resources to draw upon in the planning process. Comments also indicated support for management of rare natural communities such as pine barrens, creating larger habitat patches, and improving connectivity, including in aquatic systems.

General Public Use

Access and signage were frequently mentioned themes. Comments indicated a need for better signage and maps/information identifying what activities are available on each property. Additional hiking trails, camping locations, and river access were listed as facility needs. Several comments expressed support for maintaining a wilderness character in the area and for compatibility of recreational opportunities with sustainable management of ecological communities. Most comments that addressed motorized recreation expressed opposition to additional motorized trails.

Property-specific Comments

Wild Rivers

The two wild rivers, particularly the Pine-Popple, elicited the majority of property-specific comments. Overall, the comments expressed support for the wild rivers and the recreational opportunities they provide. Requests for additional facilities/opportunity included additional signage and maps/information, more carry-in boat access sites, walking trails, and campsites, and allowing dispersed camping anywhere along the river for paddle-in users. Many comments about the Pine-Popple addressed a similar issue: enhanced/additional recreational developments centered around Breakwater Falls (the area of the Pine River between the Pine River Dam and the WE Energies generating station), and also including La Salle Falls and the Oxbow. Facilities requested include additional signage, better access to Breakwater Falls via steps and/or boardwalks, construction of overlooks for viewing the falls, and looped hiking trails connecting Breakwater Falls with La Salle Falls, Halls Creek, and campgrounds managed by WE Energies around the Pine Flowage. Several comments addressing motorized recreation indicated both opposition to additional trails near the wild rivers and the need to route trails on state land for improved connectivity.

Comments addressing resource management on the wild rivers indicated support for their protection and management of their ecological communities. Support was expressed for the long-term protection of the WE Energies land around the Pine River and for maintaining wild river zoning protections including setbacks and lot size requirements. One comment requested improving the trout fishery on the Popple River, citing logging in the river corridor, lack of regeneration due to excessive deer herbivory, and removal of beaver dams as factors leading to the decline in habitat quality. Comments addressing forest management indicated support both for timber production and for old-growth management, as well as concern over management for emerald ash borer.

Several comments expressed support for the Wild Rivers Advisory Committee and requested that it be carried forward into the new master plan.

Spread Eagle Barrens State Natural Area

Several comments addressed this property, requesting additional facilities including hiking trails, camp sites, better interpretive information and maps. Comments indicated both support for and opposition to additional ATV access. Resource-related comments indicated support for barrens management, including concern that not enough is being done to set back black cherry.

Other Properties

One comment was received addressing ATV connector trails on the Peshtigo River State Forest.

Another comment addressed access on State Natural Areas (SNAs) on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Florence County. These SNAs are owned by the U.S. Forest Service, and so are not covered by DNR's master planning process.